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UNCLAS SECTION01 OF 03 SAN JOSE 000525

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

EPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC AND P/M;
ALSO FORUSAID/LAC AND OFDA
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR FPA AND SJFQ

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [CS](#)
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: MORE MEANINGFUL MILITARY MISSIONS

REFS: A) 2008 SAN JOSE 00, B) 2008 SAN JOSE 0800,
C) 2008 SAN JOSE 01, D) 2008 SAN JOSE 551,
E) SAN JOSE 0028 F) SAN JOSE 0023,
G) SAN JOSE 499, ALL NOTAL

SAN JOSE 00000525 001.11 OF 003

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Significant U.S. military humanitarian missions and training took place in Costa Rica during April and May, continuing the string of activities begun in late 2007. In April, over 150 U.S. military personnel practiced disaster management and recovery techniques with civilian colleagues from Costa Rica and Panama as part of the regional FA-HUM exercise. This was the largest U.S. military exercise conducted here in recent years, and the first deployment to Costa Rica of aviation assets from the New Mexico National Guard as part of the State Partnership Program. Over 150 patients were treated by U.S. and Costa Rican personnel in an accompanying Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE) along the mid-Pacific coast. In May, 16 Air Force South personnel teamed with Costa Rican counterparts in a MEDRETE which treated another 4000 patients in northern Alajuela province. Both activities received prominent and positive media coverage (coordinated by the Embassy) with the Ambassador leading a VIP visit to the FA-HUM sites. Both activities also underscore how far bilateral civilian-military relations have progressed during the Arias administration. As long as we continue to coordinate closely with the GOCR, moving neither too far nor too quickly, this positive trend should continue. END SUMMARY.

FUERZAS ALIADAS HUMANITARIAS (FA-HUM) 2009

2. (U) REGIONAL REACH: FA-HUM 2009 was the latest in an annual series of exercises designed to improve regional disaster preparedness and cooperation. The focus was on Central America and the Caribbean Basin, with the exercise taking place simultaneously in Antigua, Grenada, Honduras and Costa Rica, involving personnel from 25 countries. The action in Costa Rica took place April 20-25 as U.S. personnel from SOUTHCOM, Air Force South, Army South and the New Mexico National Guard (the State Partner with Costa Rica) worked with Embassy personnel (from the Office of Defense Representative and OFDA), Costa Rican civilian counterparts, and a canine rescue team from Panama. Observers from Argentina, Bolivia and Chile were also involved.

3. (U) COSTA RICA COMPONENT: Under direction of SOUTHCOM's Standing Joint Force Headquarters (SJFHQ) element (which also coordinated all

FA-HUM 2009 activities around the region), an international, inter-agency command center was established in San Jose with two local operations centers set up in the Quepos-Parrita area on the central Pacific coast. Disaster scenarios, designed in close coordination with Costa Rican National Emergency Commission (CNE) and Red Cross staff, were intended to provide realistic training in response to pandemics, mudslides and earthquakes. At the same time, 14 medical personnel from AFSOUTH (81st Medical Group at Keesler AFB) and 12 from the New Mexico National Guard (44th Medical Group), worked with Costa Rican counterparts to conduct a real-life MEDRETE.

Over a 10-day period, they provided pediatric, dental, optometry, gynecological, dental and general medical care to 1,543 patients in 10 communities in the region. As with other recent MEDRETEs, the communities were selected by the GOCR because of their need and isolation. None of the local residents has access to regular medical care.

¶4. (U) VIP VISIT: On April 23, the Ambassador, Vice Minister of Security Marcela Chacon, CNE Director Vanessa Rosales, and legislators Xinia Nicolas (PLN), Olivier Jimenez (PLN) and Bienvenido Venegas (PUSC) flew to Quepos in New Mexico National Guard helicopters from the 1-171st General Aviation Battalion to visit the local command post and observe building rescue exercises. The legislators represented Puntarenas province, where FA-HUM was taking place, and the site visit to a U.S. military-supported humanitarian activity was the first-ever for Nicolas and Venegas.

¶5. (U) POSITIVE PRESS: International and national media coverage of FA-HUM 2009 (facilitated by the Embassy, SOUTHCOM and the New Mexico National Guard) was positive and extensive. There were 20 stories in local and international newspapers, 11 local television reports and four local radio reports. In addition to the MEDRETE, journalists covered the arrival of the two USAF C-17 Globemaster II aircraft that transported the New Mexico Blackhawks, over 60

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